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**SPONSORSHIP IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD:
ABUSES IN AIR FORCE OFFICER MENTORING**

by

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Preface

Moral courage includes the willingness to stand up for what we believe is right even if that stand is unpopular or contrary to conventional wisdom.

Joint Pub 1

Taking a stand against an entrenched system, I have found, is about as popular as taking a stand against “mom, apple pie, and the American flag.” It is especially difficult when the system you are attacking is practiced under the guise of a far more popular and “politically correct” system. So it is with mentoring. I have found it neither popular nor in line with conventional wisdom to expose and argue against senior leadership (read general officers) and their implicit privilege to advance one of their protégé’s careers if they see fit to do so.

To be fair, I must admit that my career was affected by the consequences of a mentoring relationship that I felt abused the performance-based promotion and assignment system in the United States Air Force. Some call it “sour grapes” while others call it “an axe to grind.” I prefer to call it exposing unfairness and that unfairness was the catalyst for writing this paper. Finding hard data and written literature to support my thesis proved extremely difficult and I had doubts whether or not to continue my research or change my topic altogether to something a bit more conventional and a lot easier to defend. What convinced me otherwise were the many fellow students who approached me with unsolicited stories about their personal experiences with the “good

old boy” system. Their obvious conviction, together with my personal passion, convinced me there was a problem in the system that needed to be addressed, regardless of its sensitivity. The Air Force, as a bastion of fairness and virtue, can not tolerate an abuse of its system for promoting individual careers. As an institution expected to maintain a higher standard than the general public, the Air Force must ensure individuals are selected for leadership positions based on their performance, not on who they know.

Despite the unpopularity of my topic and the associated difficulties in uncovering incontrovertible evidence of abuse, I would like to acknowledge the support given to me by the many students who provided anecdotes and encouraged me to continue my project when it seemed unwise to do so. Additionally, I would like to thank my faculty advisor, Colonel James Slaton, for his patience regarding slipped suspenses and his willingness to sponsor an unpopular topic.

Abstract

Mentoring is the new buzzword and the “politically correct” practice in today’s civilian and military workplaces. When implemented correctly and fairly, mentoring serves a useful purpose. However, senior Air Force leadership has fostered an atmosphere where mentoring in the officer corps has been corrupted to nothing more than outright sponsorship, and in some cases, cronyism. This backslide to the “good old boy system” is, at the very least, causing morale problems among the officers, and at times, is allowing Air Force leadership positions to be filled with people who are not necessarily the most qualified, but instead are the most well-connected. Unfortunately, the system is self-perpetuating and if left unchecked, will degrade Air Force leadership to unacceptable levels.

This paper analyzes this unhealthy trend in Air Force leadership by first discussing the indicators that such a problem, indeed, exists. Secondly, it will seek to quantitatively and anecdotally prove that sponsorship and favoritism are alive and well in today’s Air Force. Finally, this paper suggests some remedies to reduce the likelihood of future corruption of the mentoring process.

Chapter 1

Introduction



Figure 1. Three Air Force Generals

Colonel Creech, Major McPeak, and Captain Fogleman serving together in Southeast Asia. All became four-star generals. Generals McPeak and Fogleman each went on to become Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force.

Coincidence or Cronyism?

One picture is worth a thousand words. So it is with the photograph above...it speaks volumes about an ongoing problem in today's Air Force. Most individuals would

find it more than a little coincidental that three fighter pilots stationed and flying together in Vietnam would all, within the next 25 years, go on to become significant figures in the senior leadership of the United States Air Force. Even more amazing is that the same three individuals would be photographed together in what seems to be a deliberate pose. This is not a chance photograph of an entire squadron of pilots in Southeast Asia...it is three individuals in a pose which suggests a close personal relationship. The fact that the three individuals climbed the ladder of success in a way that very few Air Force officers do, raises some interesting possibilities. Were there other factors involved in these officers' ascent to General Officer or did one lucky photographer just happen to snap the world's most prophetic "Polaroid?" Even the most virtuous and trusting individual might question how purely coincidental this photograph really is.

Perhaps Colonel Creech was just an exemplary mentor whose tutelage of Major McPeak laid the groundwork for a successful career built strictly upon hard work and performance. Colonel Creech and/or Major McPeak may well have laid the same foundation for Captain Fogelman. After all, a successful mentoring program should produce top-notch performers...that's its function. Still, the mere coincidence of three close friends (some relatively junior in rank) all making it to the highest rank in the Air Force raises the question of what other factors helped decide their success. More to the point, it's not a great leap in logic to draw a conclusion that having the right friends in the right places can be a significant benefit to one's career. This is not to say that Generals Creech, McPeak, and Fogelman were not talented officers in their own right, but one cannot dismiss the perception that "sponsorship" and "riding someone else's coattails" may have had more than an incidental effect on their careers.

There has been a marked increase in the perception that sponsorship within the USAF has risen dramatically in the last four to five years. Hidden behind the much more palatable and politically correct term of “mentoring,” this unofficial process of catapulting a protégé to undeserved or accelerated success is disrupting normal relationships in the military structure. Very few individuals refute that mentoring, when correctly administered, is necessary to prepare and groom future leaders, but current senior leadership erodes the legitimacy of mentoring through its improper use, or in extreme cases, abuse. Un-mentored officers begin to mistrust the “work hard and get rewarded” work ethic while the credibility gap between them and their leaders continues to widen. In effect, senior Air Force leadership has corrupted the mentoring program to such an extent that it now smacks of sponsorship and cronyism and is detrimental to the future effectiveness of the service.

Origins of Mentoring

The term mentor originated from Greek mythology. As the story goes, prior to departing for the Trojan Wars, Odysseus asked his trusted friend Mentor to watch over his son, Telemachus. Mentor, who was actually the goddess Athena, accepted the responsibility and ensured Telemachus was well educated and supervised in the ways of the world so that he would enter adulthood prepared to assume his place in society.¹ In current usage, mentoring is the relationship between a senior person (mentor) and a young adult (protégé) where the senior member plays a major role in shaping and molding the younger member in his or her professional career.² Certainly, in this light, mentoring is an honorable and worthy aspiration as long as the mentor does not cross the line between “shaping” a career and “making” a career.

The military has unofficially practiced mentoring for quite some time, albeit under a different label. In its mildest form, supervisors routinely “mentored” their subordinates through “career counseling.” The supervisor advised his young charge on suggested assignments and career choices based on his own (the supervisor’s) best estimate of the subordinate’s aspirations and how best to fulfill them. It was a simple exchange of thoughts and recommendations between two individuals. The supervisor very seldom got more involved than to express his opinions based on his own experience and knowledge. In this relationship, the subordinate usually sought out the supervisor or senior officer because he trusted and admired what the superior had accomplished in his own career, and there was never an expectation of anything more than advice. In a more robust form, mentoring was tantamount to a “sponsor” who would not only give career advice, but who would also actively take steps to ensure the protégé’s career followed a predetermined track which maximized the chance for success. In this relationship, there was an implicit expectation of the senior officer to use his position and power to directly influence follow-on career moves of the subordinate. Though neither officially sanctioned nor detailed in any regulations, “sponsorship” was a process everybody knew existed, most everybody accepted, and a fair number yearned to be a part of in hopes of an accelerated career.

The term mentoring has only recently become popular. It is one of the current buzzwords in corporate and executive circles and the Air Force quickly adopted it (in lieu of “sponsorship”) as political correctness became an overriding concern. As “mentoring” came in, “sponsorship” went out...at least in the Air Force vernacular. However, what the Air Force practices in reality does not match what it touts as its official policy. As the

Air Force struggles to develop its formal mentoring program, perceptions of sponsorship, favoritism, careerism, and cronyism, with all their ugly connotations, continue to grow in the ranks. Perceptions have not changed much from a 1984 survey of over 250 students at Air War College and Air Command and Staff College, which tried to determine what affect mentoring had on those officers who had mentors. Among the findings, the study concluded that un-mentored officers saw the primary role of mentors as “sponsors ensuring that their proteges received the ‘correct’ jobs and the proteges as ‘ticket punchers’ concerned only with their own careers.”³ Some might attribute such a perception to an expression of discontent from those not lucky enough to have a mentor. However, even those outside the military establishment, who have spent years researching what makes great leaders, have acknowledged that the system for selecting senior leaders and generals has “tendencies toward preselection, sponsorship, conformity, and self-perpetuation.”⁴ Clearly, the problem of senior leader abuses in mentoring programs is not just a figment of the imagination...it is a genuine problem that must be recognized and expunged.

Notes

¹ Lt Col Barbara G. Fast, “Mentorship: A Personal and Force Multiplier,” *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 22, no. 3 (July-September 1996): 33-36.

² Rudi Klaus, “Formalized Mentor Relationships for Management and Executive Development programs in the Federal Government,” *Public Administration Review*, July-August 1981, p. 489.

³ Michael E. Uecker, Capt, USAF, “Mentoring and Leadership Development in the Officer Corps of the United States Air Force” (Master’s Thesis, Air Force Institute of Technology), 53.

⁴ Maureen Mylander, *The Generals* (New York, The Dial Press, 1974), 160.

Chapter 2

Background

A careerist officer believes he has a “job” to perform within a corporate bureaucracy, that the true measure of success is how far and how fast he can climb to what he perceives as the ladder of success. His credo is risk avoidance and promotion of self, his loyalty is entirely personal, his ethics situational. If he manages to maneuver himself into a command position, he uses his subordinates to advance his career with concomitantly little understanding or appreciation of his role as a leader, teacher and example to his junior officers. The tragedy of the careerist is that he is self-replicating, for he drives off many of the very type of officer needed in the military services.¹

Colonel Michael C. Wholley, USMC

Trouble Brewing

In its purest form, mentoring is absolutely essential to developing future leaders. The civilian business sector has used mentoring quite effectively in growing its mid-level and senior leaders. The Douglas Aircraft Company in Long Beach, CA has a robust tradition of effective mentoring where senior management’s involvement is visible, frequent, and integrally fused with the CEO’s long-term strategic plan.² It’s not unreasonable, therefore, to expect mentoring to be an acceptable and useful tool in nurturing future Air Force leaders as long as the process is not corrupted beyond its original intent. Mentors should play influential roles in helping their protégés help themselves to succeed, not in

causing outright success.³ In his book, *Taking Charge*, Major General (retired) Perry Smith devotes an entire chapter to the mentoring process, although he unfortunately refers to it as “sponsorship.” He warns the leader to be very careful not to fall into the trap of “cronyism” where pushing “his boys” can often cause great morale problems in his unit.⁴ The need for professional officer development withstands scrutiny from any camp...the challenge lies in administering a mentoring program which supports professional development, but that avoids the pitfalls of cronyism and the perception of undue command influence. Several recent events have indicated that many officers may not feel the Air Force has succeeded in avoiding those pitfalls.

Promotions and Retention

In a demonstration of growing dissatisfaction with the service, an unprecedented number of promotion-eligible Air Force captains submitted letters to the CY97 Major's Promotion Board and asked not to be promoted. A total of 107 officers wrote confidential letters to the board and another eight met the board with “Do Not Promote” recommendations on their promotion recommendation forms. Although it was not unusual for the board to receive such letters, the Air Force was surprised at the number of pilots asking not to be promoted.⁵ Letters between the officer and the board remain secret and are not made available to personnel outside the official board, so exact reasons why so many officers torpedoed their own careers may never be known; however, several officers anonymously talked with *Air Force Times* in a September 1997 follow-up article. In it, they were quick to counter Major General Pamerleau's (Commander of the Air Force Personnel Center) charges that they were looking for a way to get out of their active duty service commitment in order to fly for the airlines. Instead, they contended

that quality of life, eroding benefits, and fickle leadership were the primary determinants in their decisions.⁶ For them it was not a question of if or when leadership would let them down, but rather a question of how many times it had let them down and how much more of it they were willing to endure. One pilot summed it up when, referring to inept leadership, he said, "It was obvious to me these people do not know what's going on in the field."⁷ The pilots who declined promotions had simply lost trust in their senior leaders to take care of them and their families. Indicative of that mistrust, was the pilots' requests for anonymity for fear that personnel officials would figure out who they were and generally make their lives miserable or else punish them with involuntary assignments.⁸

Hand in hand with the indicators in the promotion arena is the burgeoning aircrew retention issue. The Air Force is experiencing a dramatic exodus of its rated force as junior and mid-level pilots and navigators opt to separate from the service. Departing aircrews give several reasons why they are electing to leave, but a common thread throughout their explanations is a mistrust and disillusionment with leadership. Several pilots interviewed by *Air Force Times* in the fall of 1997 complained about squadron commanders who were relatively inexperienced because they were promoted below the zone once or even twice.⁹ These inexperienced commanders were cited as part of the reason the pilots were thinking of leaving the service. Furthermore, an Air Combat Command survey conducted in the spring of 1997 (discussed in detail in Chapter 3) confirmed problematic leadership, when fully 42 percent of the respondents singled out leadership as a major retention issue, citing specifics such as incompetence, "non-warrior" credentials, and subordination to political correctness.¹⁰ The Air Force officer

corps is sounding the warning signal in several forums. The practice of selecting leaders for something other than demonstrated job performance is driving a wedge between those leaders and their subordinates. The “mentored” elite are becoming more prevalent and the abuses in the system are becoming an irritant and roadblock to careers of many “un-mentored,” yet deserving professionals.

Same Old Problem, New Name

Unfortunately, sponsorship in the services is not a new phenomenon. The practice of ensuring the success of a subordinate has a long and distinguished history. Even worse, this favoritism is self-perpetuating, as the individuals in a position most able to correct abuses in the system are the same ones who have benefited the most from it. Even if they recognize the inherent unfairness of sponsorship, these benefactors are not going to abolish the process that helped them rise to the top. In fact, most will probably intensify the process because they perceive it as their duty to sustain the program, which they perceive, grooms future leaders.

In her book, *The Generals*, Maureen Mylander reveals notable trends in the development of general officers. Although her original intent was to write about generals in all the services, she confined her book to Army generals because she soon found that the Army sufficiently represented the general officer phenomenon in the other services.¹¹ The book is full of anecdotes describing how general officers have wheeled and dealed their way up the promotion ladder since World War I. Throughout the book, she highlights the critical role sponsorship plays in career progression while also conceding that sponsorship is something not openly discussed or admitted to. She contends, “...generals are treated as sacred cows, and procedures governing their selection remain

above scrutiny and comment...Even with prodding, generals are not apt to question a system in which they thrived. Nor are younger officers, fearing for their own careers, likely to criticize a system which might confer similar blessings.”¹² In an exceptionally vivid example, Mylander describes how General George C. Marshall leapfrogged over thirty-four more senior officers to become the Army Chief of Staff in 1939. Closer examination of Marshall’s career revealed that he was aide-de-camp to General John Pershing for six years, four of which were while Pershing was the nation’s top Army officer, and that Pershing’s efforts were largely responsible for Marshall’s meteoric rise.¹³ In a classic case of sustaining the “good old boy” network, Marshall consulted a list of outstanding officers he had known in his career, especially while Deputy Commandant of the Infantry School from 1927 to 1932. In more than a coincidence, 160 of Marshall’s acquaintances became generals during World War II, including Omar Bradley, Joseph Stilwell, Courtney Hodges, and J. Lawton Collins.¹⁴

Although Marshall’s favoritism was excessive (perhaps bordering on cronyism), today’s generals actively exercise the same type of influence to ensure their protégés’ careers proceed down the right track. Sadly, the protégés are normally identified simply by being an aide or executive officer to a general officer or senior civilian leader and they are marked from that time forward as “up and comers” or “golden boys.” In fact, aides have very often formed extremely close ties with their bosses and comparison to the father-son relationship is not inappropriate.¹⁵ Under the pretext of professional mentoring, senior leaders assume their “vital” role in ensuring they monitor subordinates’ careers and help them achieve their full potential. But mentoring that is too enthusiastic or misguided can be destructive. In such a situation, the senior leader perceives he is

benefiting the system through grooming of a future leader when he may be damaging the service through inappropriate advancement of an officer based on personal friendship. Even though it has been prevalent throughout much of the military's history, sponsorship and favoritism are not synonymous with professional mentoring...unfortunately, they have become an all too accepted alternative in today's Air Force.

Conflict with Air Force Core Values

One of the most disturbing aspects of mentoring abuses is its contradiction with the highly touted core values of the Air Force. On one hand, senior Air Force leadership steadfastly proclaims the absolute necessity for adherence to General Fogelman's three core values...integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do. Yet, on the other hand, actions by senior leadership in the area of professional mentoring seem to exhibit blatant disregard for everything that core values stand for.

Integrity First

The Air Force has always held its officers to a much higher standard when it comes to integrity. It was no accident that General Fogelman listed integrity as the first core value...its prominence before the other two core values underscored his conviction regarding its importance as the trust imperative in today's military. Most regard it as a refreshing conviction given today's societal norms that have seemingly tumbled dramatically toward dishonesty and unethical behavior. Representative of that tumble were two recent studies that discovered 67 percent of students at elite universities and 75 percent of high-achieving high-school students had admitted to cheating.¹⁶ Unfortunately, General Fogelman's emphasis on integrity rang hollow when several Air

Force general officers were caught up in that same tumble with rather public exhibits of questionable behavior. Of particular note, was the furor surrounding Lieutenant General Buster Glosson's attempt to influence a promotion board for general officers in 1994. Not only did the case highlight a lack of integrity in a senior Air Force leader, it also reinforced to many junior officers the existence of the "good old boy" system, its application as a general officer influence mechanism, and its cancerous effect on the promotion and assignment systems. An Inspector General investigation into the affair concluded that Glosson "improperly communicated with the prospective selection board members with an intent to influence their consideration concerning a specific officer, and that he lied under oath during the investigation."¹⁷ Eventually, Glosson was allowed to retire in grade as a Lieutenant General, but not before his personal conduct severely impugned the core value of integrity and reinvigorated the controversy around the ethics of sponsorship and favoritism among Air Force senior leaders.

Service Before Self

The United States Air Force Core Value booklet, dated 1 January 1997, defines *service before self* simply as professional duties taking precedence over personal desires. Careerism is the antithesis of service before self (i.e. self before service), yet it is what many perceive as the natural by-product of a mentoring relationship. Misapplied mentoring progresses to sponsorship and sponsorship progresses to careerism where the operative principle is "ticket punching." This unhealthy phenomenon entails "securing credentials for advancement as rapidly as possible while avoiding mistakes and risks that could blemish those credentials...and emphasizes short-term high performance, then pursuit of the next credential needed for promotion, promotion itself, and then a new

cycle of credential-seeking for the next rank.”¹⁸ This career profile is often associated with “mentored” officers and is increasingly criticized for its harmful consequences in the military. As “unmentored” officers continue to observe the nearly guaranteed advancement of aides and executive officers, they see mentoring as having a one-to-one correlation with early promotion and hence, success in the service. Taken further, others have implied “careerism and a brutally self-serving orientation is necessary for a military officer to attain the rank of general.”¹⁹ The repercussions of these collective perceptions are a distinct distrust of the mentoring process and a denigration of *service before self*.

Excellence In All We Do

The third and final core value directs Air Force members to develop a sustained passion for continuous improvement and innovation. *Excellence in all we do* not only suggests developing excellence, but also implies honing that excellence through experience. In other words, true excellence is never a finished product...one should always strive to become even better. Mentoring, however, often creates an environment where maturing excellence gives way to mere achievement and experience is supplanted with accelerated promotion. Mentored protégés become more concerned with their next promotion than with how they can improve themselves in their current position. Akin to careerists, these officers personify “the desire to be rather than to do...the desire to have rank, rather than to use it; the pursuit of promotion without a clear sense of what to do with a higher rank once one has attained it.”²⁰ The mentored officer’s concept of excellence degenerates to being able to pick the right sponsor...one who is going places and can help out the most. An Army captain, in a candid account of sponsorship among general officers, is sadly indicative of this absence of excellence. After turning down two

aide jobs to retiring generals, he stated, “I’d have lost two years because they [the generals] couldn’t help me after leaving the mainstream.”²¹ General Fogleman envisioned the core values as the “common bond among all comrades in arms” and “the glue that unifies the force.” Corrupt mentoring practices, for many reasons, fly in the face of the Air Force’s three core values. To be consistent with *Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do*, the Air Force must rid itself of sponsorship and favoritism and their associated negative effects on organizational morale.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Joseph G. Brennan, “Ambition and Careerism,” *Naval War College Review*, XLIV, no.1 (Winter 1991): 76-82.

² Lt Col Auston E. Smith, “Mentorship in the Air Force,” in *Leadership and Ethics Reader, Department of Leadership and Ethics, Air War College*, ed. Vikki Anderson et al. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, August 1997), 537.

³ Lt Col Barbara G. Fast, “Mentorship: A Personal and Force Multiplier,” *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 22, no. 3 (July-September 1996): 34.

⁴ Perry M. Smith, *Taking Charge A Practical Guide for Leaders* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Publications, 1986), 141.

⁵ Julie Bird, “Please Don’t Promote Me,” *Air Force Times*, 25 August 1997, p. 3.

⁶ Julie Bird, “We’re Not the Bad Guys: Pilots Defend Their Requests to be Passed Over,” *Air Force Times*, 8 September 1997, p. 3.

⁷ Ibid. p 4.

⁸ Ibid., p 3.

⁹ Bryant Jordan, “Early Promotion Rules Reviewed,” *Air Force Times*, 22 December 1997, p. 4.

¹⁰ Briefing, Air Combat Command, subject: Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Results, Spring 1997. Briefing given by General Richard Hawley (ACC/CC) to aircrews on all ACC bases on various dates in Apr, May, and Jun 1997.

¹¹ Maureen Mylander, *The Generals* (New York: The Dial Press, 1974), xii.

¹² Ibid., xi – xii.

¹³ Ibid., 146-147.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶ John Marlin, “Cynicism and Careerism: Threats to Army Ethics,” *Army* 47, no. 5 (May 1997): 10.

¹⁷ Senate, Committee on Armed Services Report, Consideration of the Nomination of Lieutenant General Buster C. Glosson, United States Air Force, to Retire in Grade, 103d Cong., 2d sess., 1994. Executive Report 103-34, 3.

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¹⁸ Maj Forrest E. Waller, Jr., "Are Officers Incompetent? Military Reforms Case Against the Officer Corps," *Air University Review* 36, no. 6 (Sep-Oct 1985): 75-76.

¹⁹ Lt Col G.E. Secrist, "Defective Leadership: America's Greatest Peril," *Air University Review* 30, no. 6 (Sep-Oct 1983): 13.

²⁰ Waller, 75.

²¹ Mylander, 149.

Chapter 3

Sponsorship...Evidence, Inferences and Anecdotes

“There is a difference between leadership and management. Leadership is of the spirit, compounded of personality, vision, and training. Its practice is an art. Management is a science and of the mind. Managers are necessary; leaders are indispensable.”

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, USN
TIG Brief, 28 January 1977

Are the allegations of sponsorship, favoritism, and cronyism just exaggerated worries over nothing, or is there some substance to these claims from the field? It's extremely difficult to gather hard data on the sponsorship phenomena, because there is no definitive indicators that prove if and where abuses in the mentoring program are taking place. Senior officers don't brag about under-the-table handshakes or middle-of-the-night phone calls they make to foster protégé advancement. Even though it likely happens, admitting it would open the senior officer to questions of unethical behavior, inappropriate influence and, in extreme cases, might even be considered a violation of directives. Furthermore, the Air Force Personnel Center keeps an almost infinite database on personnel statistics, but it is unable to manipulate the database to show what influence certain duty positions or certain supervisors had on an individual's promotion or job assignment. To be fair, it is unrealistic to expect the Personnel Center to keep, let alone track, data on a phenomenon that many do not recognize as a problem. This doesn't mean that favoritism, sponsorship and cronyism don't exist. However, the proof

may reside only in inferences from available statistics, surveys, current events and anecdotes...many of which can be very compelling.

General Officer Biographies

Air Force general officer biographies are publicly available on the Internet at www.af.mil/lib/bio/index.html and provide an interesting insight into the effects of sponsorship on officer careers. The site consists of standard officer biographical sketches on every active duty Air Force general officer and many retired (since 1994) general officers. It includes a search function, but does not contain any statistical analysis or database of the biographies.

The author generated a database of this site as of 5 January 1998 by examining each available biography, with special emphasis on assignment history and effective dates of rank. The database included only "line of the Air Force" officers (i.e. no Air Reserve, Air National Guard, Judge Advocate General Corps, or Medical Service Corps) in an attempt to make a consistent comparison of assignment and promotion relationships. The database focused on how many general officers had previous assignments that are considered synonymous with obtaining a sponsor/mentor. Singled out were assignments as an aide, executive officer or special assistant to another general officer and assignments to the Air Staff Training Program (ASTRA) since these assignments are commonly accepted as being tantamount to securing a sponsor. Other advantageous assignments such as Legislative Liaison, Air Force Thunderbirds, or White House Fellows were tracked in the remarks section. Additional areas of interest included multiple assignments as an aide or executive officer, rank during an aide assignment, and

whether or not the individual's first aide assignment was before his or her first command opportunity. The complete database and explanations are included at Appendix A.

Some very interesting findings emerge when one examines the database through different lenses. Of the 362 retired and active duty general officers, 207 were associated with ASTRA or were an aide, executive officer, or military assistant to another general officer at least once in their career ($207/362 = 57.2\%$). This percentage remains fairly constant regardless of how one dissects the data. A summary of specific findings is presented in the following list. Corresponding tables are included in Appendix A.

1. Percentage of rated general officers who were aides: $146/263 = 55.5\%$
2. Percentage of non-rated general officers who were aides: $61/99 = 61.6\%$
3. Percentage of all Brigadier Generals who were aides: $102/167 = 61.1\%$
4. Percentage of all Major Generals who were aides: $58/114 = 50.9\%$
5. Percentage of all Lieutenant Generals who were aides: $35/58 = 60.3\%$
6. Percentage of all Generals who were aides: $12/23 = 52.2\%$
7. Percentage of active duty generals who were aides: $153/250 = 61.2\%$
8. Percentage of retired generals who were aides: $54/112 = 48.2\%$
9. Percentage of aides who were aides before 1st command opportunity: $122/207 = 58.9\%$
10. Percentage of rated general officers who were aides before 1st command opportunity: $111/146 = 76.0\%$
11. Number of rated general officers who were never a squadron commander: 41
12. Percentage of rated general officers who were aides but were never a squadron commander: $27/41 = 65.9\%$

Notes:

- 1) The term "aide" is used to indicate an assignment as ASTRA, aide, executive officer or special assistant
- 2) All categories include active duty and retired general officers unless specifically excepted
- 3) "Rated" general officers include pilots and navigators

The question still remains, "so what?" The answer lies in whether or not one believes sheer experience gained as an aide or executive officer is more determinative of future success or if personal relationships generated during assignments as an aide or executive officer are more consequential. There are individuals who believe experience

as an aide is the only benefit that could possibly impact future career success. These individuals consider the above statistics insignificant, and no amount of data would persuade them otherwise. On the other hand, there are individuals, supported reasonably by the above statistics, who perceive an unhealthy correlation between assignments as an aide or executive officer, sponsorship, and career success. The existence of this apparent sponsorship process, even when referred to as mentorship, cannot be trivialized.

One might obtain perfect visibility on the influence of being an aide if it were possible to determine how many aides did NOT get promoted to general officer. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ascertain this data unless you were to review the assignment history of all Air Force officers to determine if they were an aide and whether or not they were promoted to general officer. To complicate matters, officer assignment histories are not part of the public domain and AFPC does not track specific duty titles that would allow such a review. However, one suitable way to highlight the magnitude of this sponsorship phenomenon is to compare the percentage of aides who became generals with the percentage of available aide billets as a whole across the Air Force. According to the 1997 DoD Almanac, there are 274 active duty Air Force general officers and 3948 active duty Air Force colonels (both these numbers includes Judge Advocate General and the Medical Service Corps).¹ By making some reasonable assumptions, one can estimate the number of aides available for promotion to general officer in a given promotion cycle.

- Every general officer has an aide who is an aide for only one year = 274 aides
- Each of the 274 aides remains on active duty and competes for brigadier general
- Up to five year groups can be considered for BG during any one cycle = 1370 aides (5×274)
- Percentage of brigadier generals who were aides = 61.1% (see page 18)
- Percentage of colonels eligible for BG who were aides = 34.7% ($1370/3948$)

The above information indicates that the colonel who has been a general's aide has almost twice the chance of becoming a general officer than does the individual who has not been a general's aide. Though the data does not allow one to draw a direct correlation between being an aide and being "sponsored," the inference is unmistakable...there is a definite advantage to holding a position as an aide when it comes to career success. The resulting perceptions in the field serve only to strengthen the allegation of the existence of sponsorship and the "good old boy" network.

It is possible to formulate another particularly significant conclusion from analysis of the database when compared to other leadership criteria. In response to criticism from the field about incompetent leaders, Air Combat Command (ACC) gathered data on the Command's rated general officers in order to bolster trust in senior leadership among the rank and file. In an attempt to lend credibility to its senior leadership, ACC selected two "Warrior Criteria" that it considered acceptable indicators of leader competence in the Combat Air Forces. The two criteria were Weapons Instructor Course Graduate and Standardization/Evaluation member...both of which are considered indicators of tactical prowess. By its own calculations, ACC determined that 58 percent of its rated general officer force met at least one of the "Warrior Criteria."² This statistic arguably supports the competence of some of ACC's rated general officers, but more striking is the fact that analysis of the general officer database reveals 55.5 percent of the rated generals and 57.2 percent of all generals had an assignment as an aide, executive officer, or ASTRA. The conclusion, of course, is that it is equally important to have been an aide to another general officer as it is to have been a "warrior" in order to become a senior leader. In

other words, having the right connections is just as important as warrior competence when aspiring to general officer rank in the Air Force.

Several other statistics from the database are just as intriguing. One can infer some dubious relationships even though the correlation between these statistics and the existence of sponsorship cannot be irrefutably established. Of particular note is the fact that a full three-quarters (76.0%) of rated general officers were aides or executive officers before their first command opportunity, commonly accepted to be the squadron commander position. Similarly, 65.9 percent (27 of 41) of rated general officers who were never squadron commanders were, in fact, aides or executive officers at least once in their career. To grasp the significance of these two statistics, one must first recognize that squadron commander is the most highly regarded and most sought after job in the rated force, not to mention a pilot's or navigator's first real test of command potential. Both of these statistics, once again, raise the question of the importance of knowing the right people. One can only suspect how much influence supervisors had on their protégés' assignments and promotions given the fact so many generals were aides before they ever proved themselves as commanders, and when so many generals who never occupied the most coveted of rated jobs, did seem to have time in their careers to be aides. The evidence is not categorically conclusive, but it is strong enough to sow the seed of doubt about an unethical, but active process of sponsorship and favoritism.

Aircrew Retention Survey

Just as the biographical facts seem to bear out an appearance of sponsorship and favoritism, so too, are Air Force members in the field just as convinced that questionable

mentoring practices are influencing leadership positions at every level. In reaction to an exodus of pilots, the Commander of Air Combat Command (ACC) commissioned a survey of his rated aircrew force to determine what the major retention issues were. In the spring of 1997, staff officers visited all ACC bases to obtain written and verbal feedback on what was causing rated aircrew members to leave the service in huge numbers. The ACC Commander personally briefed each base on the survey findings (see Appendix B) in late spring and early summer of 1997. In addition to the expected issues of operations tempo and erosion of benefits, lack of operational credibility and accelerated career progression cropped up as significant career irritants and indicators of deeper problems related to trust in leadership.

The officers who originally conducted the survey broke out leadership as a separate category when they developed the briefing for COMACC. The category distinguished itself due to “the vehement response during the discussion phase of briefings at every base.”³ Several negative leadership themes emerged from the survey with roots in the byproduct of sponsorship. First, there was a lack of faith and trust in senior leadership. There was a general perception that leadership concentrated on “looking good rather than combat capability.”⁴ Second, leaders exhibited typical careerist behavior of minimizing risk and not rocking the boat (“can’t say no” and “no top cover”) and were perceived as “building their OPR on a touch and go.”⁵ Finally, many leaders were characterized as incompetent in their weapons system, too politically correct, and not focused on the mission.⁶ These types of shortcomings were not isolated complaints...they were heard from a full 42 percent of the survey respondents. This overwhelming perception of incompetent leadership should give the Air Force reason to pause. Putting the wrong

people in charge for the wrong reason is not only a negative influence on aircrew retention, it is indicative of sponsorship and favoritism at the highest levels.

The ACC Aircrew Retention Survey also highlighted the field's suspicion of the promotion system as an outgrowth of sponsorship. There was a general consensus that the Air Force system for picking commanders was flawed because it "required" a Below-the-Primary-Zone (BPZ) promotion to be competitive. Since BPZ promotion was often associated with assignments such as generals' aides and executive officers, many officers felt the promotion system picked the wrong people for the wrong reason and rewarded "administrative prowess" instead of leadership potential.⁷ This was not an unreasonable perception. In fact, the ACC Commander had at one time commented to his wing commanders during a leadership conference in 1995 that BPZ promotees were not leading enough of the Command's squadrons. Though never incorporated into official policy, the comment sent wing commanders scurrying to fill upcoming squadron commander vacancies with nothing but BPZ personnel. It wasn't until the outcry from the field became too strong that the ACC Commander recanted his statement and wing commanders felt comfortable selecting the best qualified candidates for squadron commanders whether they were BPZ or not. Still, the facts supported a different story. As ACC tried to defend its leadership BPZ rate, it admitted that the majority of its rated forces' squadron commanders were BPZ selects. Fully 51 percent of its fighter squadron commanders and 53 percent of its bomber squadron commanders were early promotion selects at least once in their career.⁸ Clearly, one hopes the Air Force would select only the very best to lead its squadrons. Despite ACC's credible attempt to highlight discontinuities in perception and reality in BPZ rates of its squadron commanders, the data

still presents a disheartening picture. When over half of the sitting fighter and bomber squadron commanders are early promotees and when there are specific comments from the field about distrust in promotion criteria, there may indeed be a problem. Sometimes, it may be impossible or unpopular to quantify sensitive issues from the field, yet that does not make them nonexistent. Regardless of the “spin” ACC puts on this issue, the evidence indicates Air Force members in the field see and feel the unhealthy results of sponsorship among their commanders.

Air University Surveys

Other surveys have also supported the commonly held belief that “mentoring” is alive and well in the Air Force, albeit not in the positive sense that most senior leaders would like to think. An Air Force Institute of Technology (AFIT) student, Captain Uecker, conducted a survey in 1984 of 252 students at the Air War College (AWC) and the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) for his thesis on mentoring in the Air Force. The purpose of his project was to “determine the existence and prevalence of mentoring in the Air Force and to examine how it has affected the careers of officers who have mentors.”⁹ One of the consistent findings of the report, regardless of rank, MAJCOM, or background, was that “mentored officers enjoy a significantly greater likelihood of promotion ahead of their contemporaries.”¹⁰ As an example, 80 percent of the senior students at the AWC who had mentors also had at least one BPZ promotion whereas the BPZ rate among the unmentored officers was only 67 percent.¹¹ One final conclusion drawn from the data showed the significance of having a mentor as an individual progresses in his or her career. The survey determined that only 38.5 percent of ACSC

students had a mentor while 47.6 percent of the AWC students had a mentor; leading to the conclusion that “as officers attain higher positions in the organization, the role of mentor becomes more **decisive** (emphasis added) in furthering one’s career.”¹² Coincidentally, the data from the Air Force General Officer database in Appendix A supports the same conclusion. If assignments as an aide or ASTRA are associated with having a mentor, general officers as a group exhibit a ten percent jump in having a mentor (57%) over the AWC sample in this study. These results taken together further embolden the assertion that mentoring plays more than a casual role in one’s career success.

Captain Uecker’s survey revealed one more very important finding regarding the relationship between mentoring and sponsorship. Random comments from the respondents showed a clear link between the mentoring process and the harmful effects of sponsorship, at least as individuals in the field perceived it. Uecker’s report stated:

“[E]ven among the relatively senior and mature officers attending Air War College, some who do not have mentors perceive that mentoring is a vehicle by which a protégé gets a ‘free ride’ to the top. This feeling, that the mentor is primarily a sponsor and protector, is even more prevalent among the Air Command and Staff College students who responded. One ACSC student wrote that an informal discussion among his classmates concerning the survey questionnaire led to the conclusion that mentoring was nothing more than ‘organized brown-nosing’”¹³

Paralleling the perception of the “free ride” was an interesting contrast in attitudes between mentored and unmentored officers. Uecker referred to it as the “Not Me” syndrome whereby mentored officers did not perceive nor appreciate the magnitude of impact their mentoring relationship had on their own career. In other words, a protégé was more apt to attribute his success to his own performance than to the influence his mentor wielded.¹⁴ In contrast, unmentored officers perceived significant impact from the

mentoring relationship. They indicated that they felt the “sponsor” and “protector” roles played a much greater part in the mentoring phenomenon than that perceived by the protégés themselves.¹⁵ This considerable difference in perspective helps explain how and why the “good old boy” system perpetuates itself. When sponsored officers rise to a position where they can influence other officers’ careers, they don’t perceive their meddling as unusual. To them, it is a natural process and one that they feel obliged to do since they themselves benefited from it. Unfortunately, it is an attitude that perpetuates the unhealthy practice of sponsorship under the appearance of professional mentoring.

A much more recent survey given to rated officers at AWC, ACSC, and Squadron Officer School (SOS) served to corroborate the perceived correlation between sponsorship, promotion, and leadership assignments. The survey (Appendix C) was given to 311 rated officers in the winter of 1997 as part of an AWC research project. Although designed specifically to draw attention to BPZ promotions and command opportunities, the survey also shed light on sponsorship and favoritism, especially when combined with results from the ACC Aircrew Retention Survey (Appendix B). The survey asked respondents to rank order seven factors in their importance in identifying future Air Force senior leaders. Respondents had to rank order the factors twice...once in their relative importance to how leaders are currently identified and a second time in their relative importance to how leaders should be identified. The seven factors were job performance, ops credibility, squadron command, resident senior service school graduate, completion of a joint tour, completion of a Pentagon tour, and BPZ promotion.

The data was analyzed against field grade, company grade, on-time field grade, and BPZ field grade categories. The results of the two questions were strikingly different.

All four categories ranked BPZ as most important and ops credibility as least important in the question on current practices.¹⁶ Likewise, all four categories ranked job performance as most important and BPZ as least important (one group ranked BPZ as next to least important) in the question on how leaders should be identified.¹⁷ The stark reversal of priority between what is critical and what should be critical to selecting future leaders is disturbing, especially when combined with comments from the ACC Aircrew Retention Survey.

The two surveys highlight the same problem...officers believe that BPZ promotions are the guaranteed ticket to leadership positions, but they also believe their leaders are incompetent, promoted for the wrong reasons, and rewarded for administrative prowess instead of operational credibility. The link between the two is a system that, all too often, assigns and promotes individuals because a mentor exerts undue influence to ensure a protégé succeeds. Survey results from the field indicate a growing dissatisfaction with favoritism and the careerist attitude it develops. This dissatisfaction will continue to grow unless the abuses in mentoring are held in check.

Promotion Scandal – The Glosson Affair

Corrupted mentoring practices are not a new phenomenon...tragically, they are an old problem under a new name. A recent general officer promotion scandal highlighted the all-too-often-ignored practice of senior leaders influencing others' careers in a personal manner. The case involved the alleged "improper" communications between Lieutenant General Buster Glosson and three officers who had been designated to serve on an October 1993 selection board to consider candidates for promotion to Major

General.¹⁸ Glosson allegedly spoke to the three officers and indicated to them in veiled comments that a certain individual meeting the promotion board was, in his opinion, unworthy of continued advancement. The three potential board members rightly reported Glosson's attempted influence to the Air Force Chief of Staff and Air Force Secretary because it violated DoD Directives. The ensuing Air Force Inspector General investigation and Senate Armed Services Committee hearing generated extensive publicity and rekindled the controversy surrounding issues of sponsorship and cronyism in the Air Force. In the final analysis, Glosson received a Letter of Admonishment and was forced into early retirement in the grade of Lieutenant General. There was, however, a significant minority opinion that questioned the integrity of a system that allows senior leaders to get away with flagrant and unethical attempts to influence officers' careers.

“Military honor is not a ‘sometimes thing.’ It starts with cadets, plebes and ROTC and continues throughout careers. To expel students from the academies for ethics violations with respect to exams, but promote those involved in more serious violations at the top end of the rank scale is not right. The Committee suggests to students at the academies that ‘honor’ is only for the lower ranks when it rewards wrong-doing at the flag level with promotions.”¹⁹

The Glosson affair painted a disturbing picture of how senior leaders attempt to improperly wield personal influence, but the process has a shameful history than can't seem to be overcome. There are many documented cases of flagrant attempts (and successes) at influencing promotion results by senior leaders. Even after the Glosson affair and up through 1995, there were 54 individual accusations of promotion improprieties, which gave the promotion system a “black eye.”²⁰ A 1992 Senate Armed Services Committee Report brought to light the extent of the problem. The report referenced an Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) review that examined promotion board irregularities. The review found that since the 1960's, the Air Force had “allowed

certain senior officers and civilian officials to provide to general officer promotion boards a list of eligible officers recommended for promotion...that were personal choices for promotion of the officials who prepared the lists, and proposed for promotion a small subset of the eligible officers.”²¹ Specific examples of abuses of influence and corresponding implications of cronyism include:

- An officer being added to the Major General list after the Chief of Staff asked the board to consider him. His selection bumped another officer who was originally selected.²²
- In 1988, at the suggestion of the CSAF, the SECAF increased the number of selectees after a particular officer failed to meet the cutoff. The officer was subsequently selected and promoted.²³
- A promotion candidate’s scores were manipulated through repeated recounting resulting in eventual promotion. The promotion bumped one other officer from the list.²⁴



Figure 2. Air Force Promotions?

Embarrassing cases such as these stimulated the services into developing DoD Directive 1320.12, Defense Officer Personnel Program, which included mandatory procedural requirements for the conduct of promotion boards. The Air Force actively participated in developing the directive, but curiously opposed including general officers

in the promotion board restrictions and subsequently failed to issue appropriate implementing regulations.²⁵ The Air Force’s reluctance to support DoD promotion board guidance produced an institutional climate that continued to sanction the “good old boy” network. At its worst, the promotion system was “unfair, encouraged cronyism and misled thousands of officers into thinking their records were being reviewed by the final selection board.”²⁶ Whether or not the Glosson affair evoked enough bad publicity to stifle future abuses of influence by senior leaders is yet to be seen. Hopefully, the Air Force has corrected cronyism and sponsorship in the promotion process, but there are signs that these ills may still exist in the assignment process.

Anecdotal Evidence

As the Air Force embraces mentoring in the context of its officer professional development, stories from the field indicate the program is in danger of collapse due to mistrust by those it is supposed to help. Whereas civilian and military literature discuss mentoring in terms of *developing* individuals, the practice among Air Force senior leadership seems to be grounded more in terms of *sponsorship* and *favoritism*. This isn’t surprising given that such a high percentage of today’s senior leaders are products of a system where sponsorship was not only sought after, but also accepted as part of the game. Consequently, those senior leaders have a natural tendency to fall back on what they best understand and are most comfortable with. The resultant inability to fully adopt an objective mentoring program leads them to perceive mentoring as simply a process whereby they “sponsor” a junior officer and insure he or she gets the right assignments at the right time. Leaders presume that doing so, eventually leads to below-the-zone

promotions and replenishes the pool of “golden boys” from which to select future leaders.

The obvious drawback is that those without mentors (read sponsors) are the ones who pay the price in missed promotion, assignment and leadership opportunities. As more and more “mentored” individuals secure coveted positions, the charges of cronyism from among the non-mentored masses become more indisputable.

There are many stories that support claims that the “good old boy” network is alive and well. Interestingly, the stories are not isolated incidents...almost every Air Force member can reflect back and remember an instance where they felt one of their co-workers was benefiting unfairly from a senior supervisor’s interest in the co-worker’s success. Clearly, the issue would not manifest itself in so many cases if there weren’t some substance to the problem. Consider the following true examples: (author sanitized names and bases for privacy)²⁷

Lt Col Smith is at a premier fighter wing in ACC and has performed in an absolutely outstanding manner in the several different jobs he’s held since arriving at the unit two years ago. He has thoroughly impressed the Operations Group Commander as part of his staff and is now considered the “best Operations Officer in the Wing” as written in his latest performance report. During the ACC Flying Squadron Commanders Selection Board, Lt Col Smith is ranked number one among all the candidates. The Wing Commander has planned to move Lt Col Smith into a fighter squadron commander billet that is to open up in about five months. A month later, the Wing Commander was directed to fill the upcoming commander billet with Lt Col Jones...an officer unknown to the Wing Commander and who had yet to arrive on station. The Wing Commander was reluctant to adjust his plan because he felt that Lt Col Smith was far more qualified and experienced than Lt Col Jones. Furthermore, by doing so, Lt Col Smith would be forced outside his window of opportunity to command a fighter unit due to time on station concerns. The Wing Commander defended his position to the NAF CC and the MAJCOM CC, and even offered to make Lt Col Jones an operations officer (a natural progression) followed by squadron command in about a year. The Wing Commander’s arguments fell on deaf ears. It turned out that Lt Col Jones had been one of the “favored executive officers” of the MAJCOM CC and, accordingly, possessed all the right

stuff to immediately fill a squadron commander position. To make matters worse, the wing was forced to bump a captain out of a long-awaited training opportunity to accelerate Lt Col Jones' training to insure he arrived at the unit with the right credentials. Lt Col Jones got his command ticket punched in less than 19 months and spent less than two years on station before he departed for Senior Service School.

Lt Col Jones' effectiveness as a squadron commander was a matter of opinion. He was considered neither a slouch nor an exceptionally talented officer. To all outward appearances, he was an average commander; however, the conventional wisdom at the captain and staff sergeant level revealed a slightly different assessment. Most members realized Lt Col Jones was on the fast track (Jones didn't hide his ambitions to be a general officer), but they felt the commander was simply using them to further his own career. Their overall opinion was that Col Jones had "stars in his eyes" and was doing a "touch and go" at the base in order to fill his command square. Likewise, peers considered Lt Col Jones to be an average officer, but they also recognized he was going to be successful because he had a sponsor who was **making** things happen for him.

Colonel (Select) Brown was "selected" to be the new Operations Group Commander at a wing in ACC. It was fairly common knowledge, at least among the group's squadron commanders, that the incoming officer was not the individual the Wing Commander would have selected to be his new OG, given the choice. The Air Force could not "frock" the new OG to the rank of Colonel due to congressional restrictions, so the new OG showed up at the base looking like any other Lt Col. This presented quite a problem when you consider the O-5 OG had two pinned-on O-6s working for him as his deputies. A review of the OG's assignment history showed he had been promoted a total of four years below-the-zone, but had been neither a squadron operations officer nor a squadron commander. In fact, the new OG's last job in an operational flying squadron was as a flight commander over 10 years earlier. His primary qualification was that he had been an aide to a three-star general who had played a significant role in DESERT STORM and had followed that assignment with a job as a military assistant to the Executive Secretary for DoD.

The most disturbing aspect of Lt Col Brown's situation was the mixed signals it sent to the other officers in the flying squadrons. They witnessed a completely unorthodox situation where an obviously junior officer was "commanding" not only senior officers, but also an organization in which he had minimal experience. Many of Col Brown's initial actions revealed his inexperience and established a huge credibility gap between himself and the group's pilots. The message portrayed to the junior officers...you don't need experience and credibility to succeed, but you do need several below-the-zone promotions and to have served as a general's aide.

Lt Col Red was a new Civil Engineering (CE) Squadron Commander and had been in his new position for just a couple months. He and 2LT White attended a CE conference at another base. LT White, who had been TDY to Saudi Arabia since Lt Col Red had taken over the squadron, was attending the conference as part of a program whereby young CE lieutenants went to senior level conferences in order to get a feel for the vigor of command. Notably, Lt Col Red had not yet personally met LT White as she had been on leave since her return from the Middle East. During the conference icebreaker, Lt Col Red walked into the lounge to see LT White at the bar striking up a rather lively conversation with General Blue (a senior leader in the CE community). Lt Col Red approached the two to introduce himself to the General and to offer some mutual support to LT White. No sooner had Lt Col Red introduced himself than the General mentioned that LT White really needed to be moved from her present position in the squadron Environmental Flight to a different position. Against most rules of professional courtesy, General Blue "strongly encouraged" the commander to look into moving LT White in the presence of the LT. Lt Col Red tactfully informed the General that the LT was just back from extended TDY and that he would be sure to review her performance and put her in a position that would help her and the unit to grow professionally.

After careful consideration, Lt Col Red decided to leave LT White in the Environmental Flight and considered the situation closed until approximately four months later at another MAJCOM CE conference. When Lt Col Red reviewed his welcome package at the conference, it contained a letter from General Green (a subordinate of General Blue's) through Lt Col Red to LT White congratulating her on being selected to represent her base on the Civil Engineer LT Advisory Board. Lt Col Red, having not had an opportunity to nominate or comment on LT White's selection to represent his base, approached General Green and questioned

the nomination and selection process. Despite the fact that Lt Col Red had two better-qualified LTs he could have nominated, General Green told him that LT White would have to be his nominee. Apparently, General Blue had made a by-name request for LT White and General Green was not in a position to change the nominee even though he acknowledged that the process was not the normal way of doing business.

Upon return to his home base, Lt Col Red asked his senior supervisors what the relationship was between General Blue and LT White. He discovered that LT White had been the officer-in-charge of social activities during a Dining Out at which General Blue was a guest speaker. The event had occurred a few months before Lt Col Red had assumed his new position as squadron commander. LT White had caught General Blue's attention through her planning of a ski trip the General had participated in during his stay. Further inquiry revealed that General Blue had been directly e-mailing LT White on the idea of the CE LT Advisory Board since the initial CE conference four months earlier. Lt Col Red thought this communication arrangement was a little unorthodox and brought it to the attention of his functional chain of command. He was told that nobody was going to tell General Blue who he should and shouldn't e-mail and that he (Red) would have to live with it.

The crowning finale to the whole episode occurred approximately one year later. Without warning, a job showed up on the assignment bulletin board requesting a 1LT to fill a MAJCOM Environmental billet. The job was a high visibility position and had historically been given to mid-level to senior-level captains who showed promise for accelerated promotion. A 1LT on any MAJCOM staff was a rarity in itself, but a LT in such a prominent position was even more dubious. Not surprisingly, the CE personnel assignment section selected the newly promoted 1LT White to fill the position, having never even asked Lt Col Red about LT White's past performance or her suitability for the proposed assignment.

The situation with General Blue and LT White is especially egregious in its apparent favoritism across such diversity in rank and experience, not to mention the total lack of respect for chains of command. If nothing else, one would expect a senior leader to exercise a bit more subtlety and discretion in dealing with very junior officers. Nevertheless, the situation epitomizes the sponsorship phenomenon at its worst. Here was a situation where a general officer catapulted a lieutenant into an assignment that was beyond her experience level, primarily because he was impressed with her ability to

orchestrate a ski trip. Never mind that the lieutenant's fundamental professional growth was cut short or that her (or any lieutenant's) credibility at a MAJCOM staff was severely limited or that some other more deserving captain was denied the assignment. In other words, a general officer wielded his power and dramatically influenced his protégé's assignment simply because he could. Interestingly, LT White became assistant executive officer to General Blue after approximately one year on the staff. At the very least, the Air Force is turning a blind eye to this sponsorship process...at worst, it may be condoning it under the auspices of professional mentoring.

Summary

No system or process is perfect. There is always room for improvement. However, to view discrepancies in any process without examining their relationship to external factors or similar problems in other processes is shortsighted and dishonest. One must always strive to discover the root cause or, if warranted, the existence of a more fundamental deficiency. Such is the case when examining the issues discussed above. There is no reason for excessive alarm because more than a few general officers were aides in their early careers, or because pilots are leaving the service while complaining about inept leadership, or because general officers influence a few assignments. The cause for alarm arises from the fact that the issues discussed in this chapter share a common thread that may indicate a more serious problem than any of the individual issues might suggest. The common thread is a predisposition toward discriminatory influence by senior leaders involved in the promotion and assignment processes. More disturbing is that the prevalent nature of the influence suggests the problem is endemic to

the Air Force as an institution. Ostensibly, there are official controls in place to prevent gross abuses, but too many subtle indicators still point to a system of sponsorship and favoritism that is alive and well. Adding insult to injury, the Air Force tries to justify the behavior of its senior leaders by labeling their brand of sponsorship as mentoring. Whatever the name, the results are the same...too many positions are being filled by the military equivalent of a “political appointee.” Important decision-making positions throughout the service are not being filled with the best-qualified individual, but rather the best-connected individual. The members in the field are not fooled. The question is, will the Air Force stop fooling itself before it causes irreparable damage?

Notes

¹ Department of Defense, *Defense 97 DoD Almanac* (Alexandria, VA: American Forces Information Service, 1997, Issue 5), 19.

² Briefing, Air Combat Command, subject: Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Results, Spring 1997. Briefing given by General Richard Hawley (ACC/CC) to aircrews on all ACC bases on various dates in Apr, May, and Jun 1997. See slide 25. Briefing slides are included in Appendix B.

³ Briefing, Air Combat Command, subject: Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Findings, Spring 1997. Briefing given by Major “Gonzo” Gonzales to General Richard E. Hawley (ACC/CC) Spring 1997. See slide 10. Briefing slides and selected PowerPoint note pages are included in Appendix B.

⁴ Ibid., Slide 13.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Briefing, ACC, Tiger Team Results, Slide 24.

⁷ Ibid., Slide 12. See also Briefing, ACC, Tiger Team Findings, Slide 31.

⁸ Briefing, ACC, Tiger Team Results, Slide 15.

⁹ Captain Michael E Uecker, “Mentoring and Leadership Development in the Officer Corps of the United States Air Force” (master’s thesis, Air Force Institute of Technology, 1984), 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 41.

¹² Ibid., 45.

¹³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

Notes

¹⁶ Taken from unpublished survey of 311 rated officers at AWC, ACSC, and SOS. Survey completed as part of AWC Research Project by Lt Col Carl Evans. Results to be published in spring 1998. See Appendix C for copy of raw data.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Consideration of the Nomination of Lieutenant General Buster C. Glosson, United States Air Force, to Retire in Grade*. 103d Cong., 2d sess., 1994. Executive Report 103-34, 3.

¹⁹ Ibid., 16. From the minority opinion of Senators Carl Levin, John Glenn, and Dirk Kempthorne who voted to Not Approve LTG Glosson's retirement in grade.

²⁰ G. W. Poindexter, "Promotions – Troubled System Faces Study," *Air Force Times*, 2 January 1995, 24.

²¹ Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Report on the Conduct of Proceedings for the Selection of Officers for Promotion in the U.S. Air Force*. 102d Cong., 2d sess., 1992. Senate Report 102-482, 11.

²² Julie Bird, "Most Eligible O-6s Wrongly Passed Over for Promotion," *Air Force Times*, 9 December 1991, 3.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Senate Committee Report, Promotion in US Air Force, 19.

²⁶ Bird, "Most Eligible O-6s," 3.

²⁷ Anecdotes derived from personal first-hand experience of author or author's discussion with other Air War College students who were personally involved in the situations. Actual names of people and bases were not used to protect the identities of individuals involved in the cases.

Chapter 4

Solutions

It is always easy to point out system deficiencies, but the truly effective individual is the one who also takes the time to offer solutions to his criticisms. In the case of sponsorship and favoritism in the Air Force, developing solutions, just like substantiating the issue in the first place, is quite challenging. After all, it is never easy to reverse institutional inertia and revamp a system that has been practiced, officially and unofficially, for many decades. Nevertheless, there are simple steps the Air Force can and should take to reduce the frequency and detrimental affects of sponsorship from its senior leaders. The intent of any solution is not to prohibit senior leaders from having the flexibility to grow future leaders, but rather to make sure those future leaders are grown and not simply “ordered” into existence because of personal relationships they have with a general officer.

Bona Fide Mentoring Program

If the Air Force wants a formal program to groom future leaders, it can do so with a structured mentoring program that contains safeguards which preclude it from decaying into a mere forum for sponsorship. Ironically, the Air Force laid the groundwork for such a system in June 1995 when the CORONA TOP Conference of USAF four-star generals

broached the subject of professional mentoring programs.¹ Several policy letters from MAJCOM Commanders sprang from that conference requiring subordinate commanders to establish informal mentoring programs. The Air Force, as a whole, is just now coming up to speed on publishing directives and instructions on mentoring. Air Education and Training Command (AETC) has been the leader in establishing a mentoring program, but if their program is any indicator of the direction the Air Force is going, the Air Force can expect significant backlash and subsequent impotence in the program.

The AETC Policy Directive 36-1 specifies mentoring program elements and describes them all with professionally acceptable language. It clearly states that the AETC Mentoring Program is the “vehicle” used to help every commissioned officer, enlisted member, and civilian employee reach his or her maximum potential through professional development.² It even correctly emphasizes that “mentoring is not a promotion enhancement program,” but a professional development program designed to help individuals grow in their careers.³ Despite its good intentions, the directive has two significant shortfalls, which if corrected, would make the program an effective tool in grooming future leaders.

First, the AETC Directive makes mentoring *mandatory* for every supervisor and commander. Mandating a mentoring program is counterproductive to the process and eventually does more to destroy trust in the program than to build trust in it. Mentoring needs to be a protégé-initiated process. A motivated junior officer will seek out a trusted mentor because **he or she** wants to learn and grow professionally. The onus must be on the protégé since he or she is the only one who knows the level of trust and respect they have for any would-be mentor. An assigned mentor may not garner the necessary

admiration from the protégé to result in a successful mentoring relationship. More importantly, by not making it mandatory, an individual will assume a much more effective role as a mentor because he is motivated by a genuine and innate desire to help his protégé develop. A senior officer forced into mentoring duties may begin to despise the process, diminish its professional importance, and attempt to meet the requirements with absolute minimum effort. The natural consequence is the deterioration of acceptable mentoring practices to a system comprised of the all-too-easy alternatives of sponsorship and favoritism. When the mentor has inadequate time and motivation, yet is still expected to participate, he can easily resort to sponsorship tactics (i.e. unfair influence in promotions and assignments) to fulfill his obligation to cultivate the protégé's career. In other words, forcing a mentor/protégé relationship on every officer could increase instances of sponsorship and favoritism, not diminish them.

A second improvement necessary for an effective mentoring program concerns established chains of command. The current program in AETC, for all intents and purposes, compels mentor and protégé to be in the same chain of command. "While mentorship can occur within the chain of command, it is rare for senior-subordinate relationships to develop the special bond of trust required in mentoring and not cross the line of favoritism which would be detrimental to the organization."⁴ The problem lies in the fact that the mentor is also the supervisor and therefore is in the evaluator role. If the commander or supervisor elects to also assume mentor responsibilities, he must be extremely careful that the two roles are kept totally separate, else he opens himself to criticism of preferential treatment to one individual over another. Several institutions, including Douglas Aircraft and the U.S. Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, have

learned through experience that this scenario is less than ideal when implementing a mentor program.⁵ In its enthusiasm to establish a mentoring program, AETC inadvertently left the mentoring process vulnerable to criticisms of sponsorship and favoritism by not separating mentors from the chain of command. The situation is not unlike Air Force senior leaders' claims about mentoring their protégés (most commonly their aides and executive officers) while much of the evidence supports a more shrewd strategy of ensuring the protégé's success. If the Air Force is truly interested in effective mentoring without the negative connotations of sponsorship, it must eliminate mandatory mentoring programs and ensure mentors and protégés are not in the same chain of command.

Restricted Below-the-Primary-Zone Promotions

One of the most simple, yet effective, instruments to curb the sponsorship phenomenon is to reduce the opportunities for below-the-primary-zone (BPZ) promotions. By doing so, the Air Force will focus early promotion criteria on personal performance instead of personal connections.

Historically, the Air Force awards BPZ promotions to those officers who show extraordinary performance in their present job and extraordinary potential for future jobs. Over the years, early promotion has begun to play more and more of a decisive role in determining command opportunities and advanced promotion in a shrinking Air Force. A recent Air University survey among rated officers showed 67% of the respondents felt that promotion to Brigadier General required at least one BPZ promotion and they felt BPZ promotions were the number one factor for identifying future leaders.⁶ As the BPZ

criteria became more important to career success, the focus was shifted more onto how many BPZ promotions an individual had instead of the quality of the individual receiving the early promotion. Naturally, the career “game” became less centered on performance and credentials and more centered on which assignments guaranteed the best odds of receiving a BPZ nomination.

The chase for multiple BPZ promotions was on, and conventional wisdom said the earlier, the better. To be competitive for senior leadership positions, perceptions (some would say it was unwritten policy) were that one had to be more than one year early to a particular rank or be early to multiple ranks...preferably a combination of both. The fallout of the increased emphasis on multiple BPZ promotions was that extraordinary personal performance was no longer enough to ensure multiple early promotions. Sponsors (read general officers) became the critical factor for career success and the best way to secure a sponsor was to work for one as an aide or executive officer. The transition from individual performance to sponsorship also marked the transition of BPZ labels from “fast burner” to “somebody’s golden boy.” So sponsorship blossomed into a full time pursuit for the career-minded officer and was, indeed, sanctioned by the Air Force to identify and develop its future leaders. Sponsors almost felt an obligation to get their protégé promoted as early as possible.

Unfortunately, the emphasis on early promotions backfired on the Air Force. Not only did it encourage sponsorship by senior leaders, it also produced key leaders at the unit level who lacked operational experience. Individuals who met the “new” leadership criteria of several BPZ promotions were sorely lacking in field experience because most of them were products of sponsorship at the senior levels. Most had been artificially

accelerated into critical leadership billets by sponsors who used their influence to get their protégé into the right assignment. Instead of spending time in the field building their experience base, these new leaders had spent much of their time in administrative jobs such as aides and executive officers so as to secure the early promotions that “qualified” them for the job they now seem so unqualified to fill.

Ironically, the Air Force recently admitted that it had over emphasized the importance of early promotions in selecting individuals to fill coveted leadership positions. Lieutenant General Michael McGinty, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, said on 11 December, “As we look at developing our future leaders, we do not need officers promoted six years below the zone.”⁷ This revelation finally put some official restraint on the runaway efforts to produce 17 and 18-year full colonels to fill wing-level leadership positions. These same officers are the ones feeding the frenzy that drives senior leaders to endorse sponsorship. By restricting the BPZ promotion opportunities to one opportunity per grade at Major, Lieutenant Colonel, and Colonel, the motivation and necessity to seek a sponsor would be diminished. Likewise, the necessity for senior leaders to unfairly influence assignments for their protégés would be reduced since a qualified pool of individuals could be nurtured from the field, separate from the political game of sponsorship.

Restrictions on Influencing Assignments

A radically different approach to the assignment process could also help curb the destructive affect of sponsorship and favoritism. The approach would be directive in nature and prohibit any supervisor from calling AFPC or another unit and “trying to sell”

one of his subordinates to fill an assignment in that unit. The directive would address assignments of all field grade officers, but would be aimed primarily at positions of squadron commander and higher. The directive's intent would be to allow all candidates for a certain position to compete on their own merit, absent any influence from a senior leader or sponsor. Much like senior leaders are prohibited, by law, from communicating with promotion boards on behalf of or against any particular candidate, so too, would senior leaders be prohibited from contacting anybody in a gaining unit on behalf of or against any individual competing for an assignment. The hiring authority would have the opportunity to review all competitors and make a decision based on his own criteria, not the "strong encouragement" of a senior leader.

The prohibition against contacting another unit must be backed up with a threat of severe punishment if the system is to work. Similar to the case when General Glosson tried to influence a promotion board, the penalty for violating the directive would have to be severe enough to deter any would-be sponsor from even the most minor attempt to influence the hiring process. The imposition of the penalty would also have to be credible so that the hiring authority would not fear any retribution for exercising his authority to make the decision on his own, unencumbered by senior leader influences. The enforcement mechanism for the directive would be the deterrence value of stiff penalties and the integrity of the hiring authority.

Since it is acceptable, and indeed desirable, for a commander to select the best people he can find, the directive would not prevent the hiring authority from calling current or past co-workers or supervisors to determine the qualifications of an individual he may be reviewing. In other words, information about a potential hire can be "pulled"

from external sources by the hiring authority, but it cannot be “pushed” by external sources onto the hiring authority. To ensure all competitors have a fair shot, the central command selection boards would need to continue. The boards would provide a pool of qualified individuals to a hiring authority in case he has nobody in his immediate sphere of influence on which to draw and it would ensure all qualified personnel have an opportunity to be considered for assignment.

This suggested process also contains the added benefit that real contenders for coveted command billets may be more motivated to stay in the operational world because they can prove themselves more directly to the hiring authority. Conversely, a careerist or “sponsor-seeker” may not be so enthralled with trying to advance through administrative channels such as an aide or executive officer because he is less likely to be able to prove himself without the advantage of a sponsor’s influence. In other words, working for a senior leader in hopes of securing a sponsor and accelerated promotions would be no more advantageous (and maybe less so) than staying in the field to build up credibility and reputation. The necessity and motivation to secure a sponsor would diminish while the desire to secure a genuine mentor might increase. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the mentoring relationship would now be more effective because it would be being used for what it was originally intended...professional sharing and growth, not advancement through sponsorship.

Notes

¹ Lt Col Auston E. Smith, “Mentorship in the Air Force,” in *Leadership and Ethics Reader, Department of Leadership and Ethics, Air War College*, ed. Vikki Anderson et al. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, August 1997), 537.

Notes

² Air Education and Training Command (AETC) Policy Directive 36-1, *AETC Mentoring Program*, 15 July 97, iv.

³ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁴ Quoted in Lt Col Auston E. Smith, "Mentorship in the Air Force," in *Leadership and Ethics Reader, Department of Leadership and Ethics, Air War College*, ed. Vikki Anderson et al. (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, August 1997), 541.

⁵ Smith, Mentorship, 541.

⁶ Taken from unpublished survey of 311 rated officers at AWC, ACSC, and SOS. Survey completed as part of AWC Research Project by Lt Col Carl Evans. Results to be published in spring 1998. See Appendix C for copy of raw data.

⁷ Bryant Jordan, "Early Promotion Rules Reviewed," *Air Force Times*, 22 December 1997, 4.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Mentoring is a growth industry in the civil and military sectors. In theory, mentoring provides a process that everybody in the organization should look upon with approving eyes. When correctly administered, it provides members with professional teachers, guides, advisors, counselors, supporters, sponsors, motivators, protectors, communicators, and role models...everything an individual could ever need to grow professionally in his or her career. In practice, however, mentoring does not live up to its billing...not because it is a flawed process, but because the process is administered incorrectly. When executed improperly, mentoring quickly decays into a program of sponsorship, favoritism, and cronyism. Instead of helping a protégé **grow** into future leadership positions, mentors too often **transplant** a protégé into leadership positions without the proper experience or credibility. The mentoring program which was supposed to facilitate excellence in professional growth for everybody in the organization, now instills jealousy, mistrust and animosity between sponsored protégés and those who are not part of the “good old boy” system.

The Air Force is working hard to implement a formal mentoring program, but senior leaders still practice the art of sponsorship because it is the program they benefited from and the one program they feel comfortable propagating. Unfortunately, their reluctance

to release reliance on sponsorship and favoritism causes a growing dissatisfaction and mistrust among Air Force members. This unhealthy practice is not new, but adverse reactions to it are more obvious as the Air Force draws down in size. Many indicators, including sagging pilot retention rates, requests to NOT be promoted, and program conflicts with core values all point to a festering problem that could ruin the Air Force if left unchecked.

The most destructive symptom of sponsorship and cronyism is a mentor's unfair influence on a protégé's promotion and assignment. Too often, mentors catapult their protégé into coveted assignments with a mere phone call or message. The protégé slides into a highly desired command billet, while many times having little or no credibility for the job. Even more destructive is the fact that as the protégé slipped in, a better qualified, yet un-mentored, individual was bumped from a command opportunity he or she deserved. This miscarriage of mentoring sends a strong signal to the rest of the officer corps and does not go unnoticed. The message is unmistakable...operational prowess and leadership capabilities are not as important as early promotions and knowing the right people. In other words, get in good with a general officer and your career will take off with a self-fulfilling cycle of better assignments and early promotions. This problem is real. Surveys at Air University and Air Combat Command, general officer assignment histories, congressional reports, and anecdotes from the field confirm the existence of this unhealthy process. It is absolutely essential then, that the Air Force take positive steps to curb the perception, practice, and sanctioning of sponsorship if its leadership is to remain effective, credible and trusted.

The Air Force must begin to establish a formal mentoring program. The program should not levy a requirement for senior leaders to mentor a protégé as much as it should establish boundaries for acceptable behavior if a supervisor desires to engage in such a program. It should also include specific prohibitions against unethical or questionable influence peddling on behalf of a protégé. Paralleling the effort to establish a formal mentoring program, should be a program to educate senior leaders on how to properly mentor a protégé. The training should put special emphasis on the pitfalls inherent in mentoring and the absolute necessity to distinguish between mentoring and sponsorship. Finally, and most importantly, the Air Force should establish regulatory guidance to restrict overt and covert senior officer influence in the assignment process, just as it now restricts senior officer influence on promotion boards. Such guidance would be a bitter pill to swallow for many general officers, but it is something senior leaders must comply with in order to stem the unhealthy growth of cronyism. Mentors can stimulate professional development through proper counseling, coaching, advising, and communication without unilaterally determining the protégé's next assignment. Nominations and individual recommendations that gaining commanders "cannot refuse" must be eliminated to help eradicate the "good old boy" syndrome and its corrupting influence. Taken together, these solutions could significantly reduce the negative connotations associated with mentoring and return huge dividends in regaining the confidence of members at every level. The Air Force must commit to cleaning up its corrupted mentoring program as a source of dissatisfaction. More importantly, the Air Force owes it to itself as an institution, to its people, and to the country to uphold the

highest possible moral standards. There **is** a place and need for mentoring in the Air Force...there is no place or need for sponsorship, favoritism and cronyism.

Appendix A

Appendix A: United States Air Force General Officer Database

This appendix includes a database and associated queries generated by reviewing assignment histories and effective dates of rank from biographies of retired and active duty Air Force general officers. The biographies are located on the Internet at www.af.mil/lib/bio/index.html. The database does not include general officers from the Medical Services Corps, Judge Advocate General Corps, or Air Reserve Components.

The following key is used throughout the database and queries:

1. Name: Self-explanatory
2. Rank: Self-explanatory
3. Position: Current position or position held at retirement by the individual
4. Pilot: Rated aircrew member. Could be pilot or navigator.
5. Ret?: Retired officer
6. ASTRA?: Individual had an assignment in the Air Staff Training Program
7. Aide/Exec?: Individual had an assignment as an aide, aide-de-camp, executive officer, special assistant, military assistant, or executive assistant to a general officer
8. Aide Rank: Rank of individual while an aide/exec
9. Before CC?: Was first assignment as aide/exec or ASTRA before the individual's first command opportunity. First command opportunity was assumed to be at the squadron (or equivalent) level.
10. Aide/Exec to Whom: Position to whom the individual was an aide
- 11.>1: Applied to same information as above if individual was an aide/exec more than once
12. Remarks: Self-explanatory.

The Appendix includes the following database and queries:

Note: If viewing document via electronic means, database and queries are accessible through links contained in the filename below each title.

| <u>Database or Query</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Database: All USAF General Officers (File: All USAF General Officers.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 53 |
| 2. General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 72 |
| 3. Rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 78 |
| 4. Non-rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Non-rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 82 |
| 5. Brigadier Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Brigadier Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 85 |
| 6. Major Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Major Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 89 |
| 7. Lieutenant Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Lieutenant Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 92 |
| 8. Generals (4-Star) Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Generals (4-Star) Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 94 |
| 9. Active Duty General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Active Duty Generals Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 96 |
| 10. Retired General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA (File: Retired General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 100 |
| 11. General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1 st CC Opportunity (File: General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1 st CC Opportunity.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 103 |
| 12. Rated General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1 st CC Opportunity..... (File: Rated General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1 st CC Opportunity.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 107 |
| 13. Rated General Officers Who Were Never a Squadron CC..... (File: Rated General Officers Who Were Never a Squadron CC.xls, 20 Feb 98) | 108 |
| 14. Rated General Officers, Never a Sq CC But Were Aides..... (File: Rated General Officers_ Never Sq CC But Were Aides.xls 20 Feb 98) | 113 |

All USAF General Officers



General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Non-rated General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Brigadier Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Major Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Lieutenant Generals Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Generals (4-Star) Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Active Duty General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA

Retired General Officers Who Were Aides or ASTRA

General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1st CC Opportunity

Rated General Officers Who Were Aides Before 1st CC Opportunity

Rated General Officers Who Were Never a Squadron CC

Rated General Officers, Never a Sq CC But Were Aides

Appendix B

Appendix B: ACC Aircrew Retention Briefings

This appendix includes two briefings from Air Combat Command on aircrew retention issues. Briefings resulted from a survey directed by ACC/CC in the spring of 1997. ACC/CC initiated the survey due to an upheaval in pilot manning and other aircrew retention issues. ACC/DP was the Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) for the survey and subsequent briefings.

Note: If viewing document via electronic means, briefings are accessible through links contained in the filename below each title.

| <u>Briefing</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---|--------------------|
| Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Results (Slides and Notes) | 116 |
| (File: ACC Results.ppt, 16 Feb 98) | |
| Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Findings (Slides and Selected Notes) | 143 |
| (File: ACC Findings.ppt, 16 Feb 98) | |

ACC Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Results

ACC Aircrew Retention Tiger Team Findings

Appendix C

Appendix C: USAF Rated Officer Opinion Survey

This appendix includes questions and results of a USAF rated officer opinion survey given to students in Air War College, Air Command and Staff College, and Squadron Officer School in November and December, 1997. The survey was taken as part of a Research and Writing Project (RWP) for a student in Air War College. The research project will be published in Spring 1998 under a separate title.

USAF RATED OFFICER OPINION SURVEY RESULTS

Background and Demographic Information

- Administered to all active duty, rated USAF officers attending:
 - Air War College Class of 1998
 - Air Command and Staff College Class of 1998
 - Squadron Officer School Class 98B
- Approximately 80% of eligible officers responded
 - 31 rated AWC students
 - 139 rated ACSC students
 - 141 rated SOS students
- Distribution by grade
 - 2 Colonel (selects)
 - 29 Lieutenant Colonels
 - 108 Majors
 - 141 Captains
- Distribution by aeronautical rating
 - Overall
 - 83% were pilots (232 of 280)
 - 21% were navigators (48 of 280)
 - AWC
 - 77% were pilots (24 of 31)
 - 23% were navigators (7 of 31)
 - ACSC
 - 80% were pilots (86 of 108)
 - 20% were navigators (22 of 108)
 - SOS
 - 87% were pilots (122 of 141)
 - 13% were navigators (19 of 141)
- On-time versus early promoters (Field Grade Officers Only)
 - Overall Field Grade
 - 19% have been promoted BPZ (27 of 139)
 - 81% have never been promoted early (112 of 139)
 - AWC
 - 32% have been promoted BPZ (10 of 31)
 - 68% have never been promoted early (21 of 31)
 - ACSC
 - 16% have been promoted BPZ (17 of 108)
 - 84% have never been promoted early (91 of 108)

- Field grade respondents with prior joint duty assignments
 - Overall Field Grade
 - 12% have completed a joint duty assignment (16 of 139)
 - 88% have not completed a joint duty assignment (123 of 139)
 - AWC
 - 35% have completed a joint duty assignment (11 of 31)
 - 65% have not completed a joint duty assignment (20 of 31)
 - ACSC
 - 5% have completed a joint duty assignment (5 of 108)
 - 95% have not completed a joint duty assignment (103 of 108)

Prerequisites for Command

Question: Completion of a squadron commander tour should be a prerequisite for selection to command an operations group.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 48%(135/280) | 41%(115/280) | 4%(11/280) | 6%(17/280) | 1%(2/280) |
| Field Gr: | 47% (65/139) | 38% (53/139) | 4% (6/139) | 9% (13/139) | 1% (2/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 50% (70/141) | 44% (62/141) | 4% (5/141) | 3% (4/141) | 0% (0/141) |
| Onetime: | 41%(46/112) | 42%(47/112) | 4%(4/112) | 12%(13/112) | 2%(2/112) |
| BPZ: | 70% (19/27) | 22% (6/27) | 7% (2/27) | 0% (0/27) | 0% (0/27) |

Question: Completion of a squadron commander tour should be a prerequisite for selection to command a wing.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 57% (160/280) | 33% (92/280) | 4% (11/280) | 5% (14/280) | 1% (3/280) |
| Field Gr: | 48% (67/139) | 38% (53/139) | 4% (6/139) | 9% (13/139) | 1% (2/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 66% (93/141) | 28% (39/141) | 4% (6/141) | 1% (2/141) | 1% (1/141) |
| Onetime: | 45% (50/112) | 40% (45/112) | 4% (4/112) | 10% (11/112) | 2% (2/112) |
| BPZ: | 63% (17/27) | 30% (8/27) | 4% (1/27) | 4% (1/27) | 0% (0/27) |

Question: Completion of a tour as an operations group commander should be a prerequisite for selection to command a wing.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 29% (81/277) | 40% (112/277) | 16% (45/277) | 14% (38/277) | 0% (1/277) |
| Field Gr: | 27% (37/136) | 39% (53/136) | 16% (22/136) | 17% (23/136) | 1% (1/136) |
| Comp Gr: | 31% (44/141) | 42% (59/141) | 16% (23/141) | 11% (15/141) | 0% (0/141) |
| On time: | 25% (27/112) | 40% (40/112) | 17% (19/112) | 17% (19/112) | 1% (1/112) |
| BPZ: | 38% (10/26) | 35% (9/26) | 12% (3/26) | 15% (4/26) | 0% (0/26) |

Optimum Tour Lengths for Commanders

Question: The optimum tour length for a squadron commander should be

| | 12 months | 15 months | 18 months | 24 months |
|-----------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| Total: | 2% (6/280) | 3% (8/280) | 32% (89/280) | 63% (177/280) |
| Field Gr: | 3% (4/139) | 3% (4/139) | 31% (43/139) | 63% (88/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 1% (2/141) | 3% (4/141) | 33% (46/141) | 63% (89/141) |
| On-time: | 2% (2/112) | 3% (3/112) | 30% (34/112) | 65% (73/112) |
| BPZ: | 7% (2/27) | 4% (1/27) | 33% (9/27) | 56% (15/27) |

Question: The optimum tour length for an operations group commander should be

| | 12 months | 15 months | 18 months | 24 months |
|-----------|------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total: | 3% (7/280) | 5% (15/280) | 44% (123/280) | 48% (135/280) |
| Field Gr: | 2% (3/139) | 6% (8/139) | 4% (65/139) | 45% (63/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 3% (4/141) | 5% (7/141) | 41% (58/141) | 51% (72/141) |
| On time: | 2% (2/112) | 5% (6/112) | 4% (53/112) | 46% (51/112) |

BPZ: 4% (1/27) 8% (2127) 44% (12/27) 44% (12/27)

Question: The optimum tour length for a wing commander should be

| | 12 months | 15 months | 18 months | 24 months |
|-----------|------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Toad: | 3% (9/277) | 5% (13/277) | 36% (99/277) | 56% (156/277) |
| Field Gr: | 3% (4/136) | 4% (6/136) | 36% (49/136) | 57% (77/136) |
| Comp Gr: | 4% (5/141) | 5% (7/141) | 35% (50/141) | 56% (79/141) |
| On-time: | 2% (2/112) | 5% (5/112) | 36% (40/112) | 57% (63/112) |
| BPZ: | 8% (2/27) | 4% (1/27) | 34% (9/27) | 54% (14/27) |

Relationship Between BPZ Promotion and Potential

Question: If an officer has never received a below-the-zone promotion, do you believe he/she can still become a squadron commander?

| | Yes | No |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|
| Total: | 89% (250/280) | 11% (30/280) |
| Field Gr: | 86% (119/139) | 14% (20/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 93% (131/141) | 7% (10/141) |
| On-time: | 84% (94/112) | 16% (18/112) |
| BPZ: | 93% (25/27) | 7% (2/27) |

Question: If an officer has never received a below-the-zone promotion, do you believe he/she can still become an operations group commander?

| | Yes | No |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Total: | 50% (141/280) | 50% (139/280) |
| Field Gr: | 44% (61/139) | 56% (78/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 57% (80/141) | 43% (61/141) |
| On-time: | 41% (46/112) | 59% (66/112) |
| BPZ: | 56% (15/27) | 44% (12/27) |

Question: Which statement best describes the role played by below-the-zone promotion in identification of operations group commander candidates?

- A. An on-time officer still has a chance to be selected as an ops group commander
- B. You are not a viable candidate without a below-the-zone promotion
- C. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least two years early
- D. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least three years early
- E. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least four years early

| | A (On-time) | B (Any BPZ) | C (>2 BPZ) | D (>3 BPZ) | E (>4 BPZ) |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|------------|
| Total: | 39% (107/277) | 48% (132/277) | 9% (26/277) | 4% (11/277) | 0% (1/277) |
| Field Gr: | 32% (43/136) | 46% (63/136) | 14% (19/136) | 7% (10/136) | 1% (1/136) |
| Comp Gr: | 45% (64/141) | 49% (69/141) | 5% (7/141) | 1% (1/141) | 0% (0/141) |
| On-Time: | 30% (33/110) | 49% (54/110) | 15% (17/110) | 5% (5/110) | 1% (1/110) |
| BPZ: | 38% (10/26) | 35% (9/26) | 8% (2/26) | 19% (5/26) | 0% (0/26) |

Question: If an officer has never received a below-the-zone promotion, do you believe he/she can still become a vice wing group commander?

| | Yes | No |
|-----------|---------------|---------------|
| Total: | 57% (159/280) | 43% (121/280) |
| Field Gr: | 59% (82/139) | 41% (57/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 55% (77/141) | 45% (64/141) |
| On-time: | 56% (63/112) | 44% (49/112) |
| BPZ: | 70% (19/27) | 30% (8/27) |

Question: If an officer has never received a below-the-zone promotion, do you believe he/she can still become a wing group commander?

| | Yes | No |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| Total: | 33% (93/280) | 67% (187/280) |
| Field Gr: | 27% (38/139) | 73% (101/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 39% (55/141) | 61% (86/141) |
| On-time: | 23% (26/112) | 77% (86/112) |
| BPZ: | 44% (12/27) | 56% (15/27) |

Question: Which statement best describes the role played by below-the-zone promotion in identification of wing commander candidates?

- A. An on-time officer still has a chance to be selected as a wing commander
- B. You are not a viable candidate without a below-the-zone promotion
- C. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least two years early
- D. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least three years early
- E. You are not a viable candidate unless you are at least four years early

| | A (On-time) | B (Any BPZ) | C (>2 BPZ) | D (>3 BPZ) | E (>4 BPZ) |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Total: | 25% (68/277) | 51% (140/277) | 16% (43/277) | 8% (21/277) | 2% (5/277) |
| Field Gr: | 18% (24/136) | 50% (68/136) | 16% (22/136) | 13% (17/136) | 4% (5/136) |
| Comp Gr: | 31% (44/141) | 51% (72/141) | 15% (21/141) | 3% (4/141) | 0% (0/141) |
| On-time: | 13% (14/110) | 55% (60/110) | 17% (19/110) | 12% (13/110) | 4% (4/110) |
| BPZ: | 38% (10/26) | 31% (8/26) | 12% (3/26) | 15% (4/26) | 4% (1/26) |

Question: If an officer has never received a below-the-zone promotion, do you believe he/she can still achieve the rank of brigadier general?

| | Yes | No |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|
| Total: | 33% (91/280) | 67% (189/280) |
| Field Gr: | 27% (38/139) | 73% (101/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 38% (53/141) | 62% (88/141) |
| On-time: | 24% (27/112) | 76% (85/112) |
| BPZ: | 41% (11/27) | 59% (16/27) |

Operational Credibility

Question: Incumbent flying squadron commanders should be instructor qualified in their unit's primary aircraft.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 58% (162/280) | 26% (72/280) | 4% (12/280) | 10% (28/280) | 2% (6/280) |
| Field Gr: | 55% (76/139) | 31% (43/139) | 2% (3/139) | 11% (15/139) | 1% (2/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 61% (86/141) | 21% (9/141) | 6% (9/141) | 9% (13/141) | 3% (4/141) |
| On-time: | 53% (59/112) | 31% (35/112) | 3% (3/112) | 12% (13/112) | 2% (2/112) |
| BPZ: | 63% (17/27) | 30% (8/27) | 0% (0/27) | 7% (2/27) | 0% (0/27) |

Question: Most flying squadron commanders have attained the appropriate depth of operational experience to adequately prepare them to command a flying squadron.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 11% (31/280) | 60% (168/280) | 8% (23/280) | 15% (43/280) | 5% (15/280) |
| Field Gr: | 10% (14/139) | 51% (71/139) | 11% (15/139) | 19% (26/139) | 9% (13/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 12% (17/141) | 69% (97/141) | 6% (8/141) | 12% (17/141) | 1% (2/141) |
| On-time: | 11% (12/112) | 47% (53/112) | 13% (14/112) | 20% (22/112) | 10% (11/112) |
| BPZ: | 7% (2/27) | 67% (18/27) | 4% (1/27) | 15% (4/27) | 7% (2/27) |

Question: Most operations group commanders have attained the appropriate depth of operational experience to adequately prepare them to command an operations group.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 4% (12/277) | 61% (169) | 20% (56/277) | 13% (35/277) | 2% (5/277) |
| Field Gr: | 2% (3/136) | 54% (73/136) | 22% (30/136) | 19% (26/136) | 3% (4/136) |
| Comp Gr: | 6% (9/141) | 68% (96/141) | 18% (26/141) | 6% (9/141) | 1% (1/141) |
| On-time: | 3% (3/112) | 53% (58/112) | 24% (26/112) | 17% (19/112) | 4% (4/112) |
| BPZ: | 0% (0/27) | 58% (15/27) | 15% (4/27) | 27% (7/27) | 0% (0/27) |

Question: Most wing commanders have attained the appropriate depth of operational experience to adequately prepare them to command a wing.

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neutral/No Opinion | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|-----------|----------------|---------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Total: | 7% (19/280) | 64% (180/280) | 19% (53/280) | 9% (24/280) | 1% (4/280) |
| Field Gr: | 5% (7/139) | 61% (85/139) | 20% (28/139) | 12% (17/139) | 1% (2/139) |
| Comp Gr: | 9% (12/141) | 67% (95/141) | 18% (25/141) | 5% (7/141) | 1% (2/141) |
| On-time: | 5% (6/112) | 60% (67/112) | 21% (24/112) | 12% (13/112) | 2% (2/112) |
| BPZ: | 4% (1/27) | 67% (18/27) | 15% (4/27) | 15% (4/27) | 0% (0/27) |

Perceived Importance of Quality Indicators

Question: How important of a role do the following factors currently play in identifying future Air Force senior leaders? Rank order each of these factors: (1 - most important, 7 - least important)

Job performance as documented in performance reports; Operational credibility (flight lead, instructor, evaluator, etc.); Completion of a joint assignment; Below-the-zone promotion; Senior Service School in residence; Tour as a squadron commander; and Pentagon assignment

*** - The smaller the total point value, the higher the importance**

| Total Results | Points | Field Grade | Points | Company Grade | Points |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| BPZ | 575 | BPZ | 246 | BPZ | 329 |
| SSS | 946 | SSS | 487 | SSS | 459 |
| Sq Command | 1063 | Job Performance | 532 | Sq Command | 506 |
| Job Performance | 1075 | Joint Tour | 548 | Job Performance | 543 |
| Joint Tour | 1193 | Sq Command | 557 | Joint Tour | 645 |
| Pentagon Tour | 1261 | Pentagon Tour | 610 | Pentagon Tour | 651 |
| Ops Credibility | 1565 | Ops Credibility | 793 | Ops Credibility | 772 |

| On-Time | BPZ | | |
|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Field Grade | Points | Field Grade | Points |
| BPZ | | BPZ | |
| BPZ | 197 | BPZ | 49 |
| SSS | 400 | SSS | 87 |
| Job Performance | 429 | Job Performance | 103 |
| Joint Tour | 437 | Sq Command | 108 |
| Sq Command | 449 | Joint | 111 |
| Pentagon Tour | 496 | Pentagon Tour | 114 |
| Ops Credibility | 632 | Ops Credibility | 161 |

* -Note: Point values determined by multiplying the number of responses in by the points indicated below:

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| #1 responses X 1 points | #5 responses X 5 points |
| #2 responses X 2 points | #6 responses X 6 points |
| #3 responses X 3 points | #7 responses X 7 point |
| #4 responses X 4 points | |

Desired Importance of Quality Indicators

Question: Based on your personal opinion, how important of a role should each of the following factors play in identifying future Air Force senior leaders? Rank order each of these factors: (1 - most important; 7 - least important)

Job performance as documented in performance reports; Operational credibility (flight lead, instructor, evaluator, etc.); Completion of a joint assignment; Below-the-zone promotion; Senior Service School in residence; Tour as a squadron commander; and Pentagon assignment

*** - The smaller the total point value, the higher the importance**

| Total Results | Points | Field Grade | Points | Company Grade | Points |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|----------------------|---------------|
| Job Performance | 519 | Job Performance | 223 | Job Performance | 296 |
| Ops Credibility | 612 | Ops Credibility | 334 | Ops Credibility | 278 |
| Sq Command | 778 | Sq Command | 395 | Sq Command | 383 |
| SSS | 1267 | SSS | 602 | SSS | 665 |
| Joint Tour | 1353 | Joint Tour | 651 | Joint Tour | 702 |
| Pentagon Tour | 1575 | Pentagon Tour | 742 | BPZ | 767 |
| BPZ | 1578 | BPZ | 811 | Pentagon Tour | 839 |

On-Time **BPZ**
Field Grade **Points** **Field Grade** **Points**

| | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Job Performance | 175 | Job Performance | 48 |
| Ops Credibility | 266 | Ops Credibility | 68 |
| Sq Command | 319 | Sq Command | 76 |
| SSS | 490 | SSS | 112 |
| Joint Tour | 524 | Joint Tour | 127 |
| Pentagon Tour | 608 | Pentagon Tour | 134 |
| BPZ | 664 | BPZ | 147 |

* -Note: Point values determined by multiplying the number of responses in by the points indicated below:

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| #1 responses X 1 points | #5 responses X 5 points |
| #2 responses X 2 points | #6 responses X 6 points |
| #3 responses X 3 points | #7 responses X 7 point |
| #4 responses X 4 points | |

Glossary

| | |
|-------|------------------------------------|
| ACC | Air Combat Command |
| ACSC | Air Command and Staff College |
| AETC | Air Education and Training Command |
| AFIT | Air Force Institute of Technology |
| AFPC | Air Force Personnel Center |
| ASTRA | Air Staff Training Program |
| AU | Air University |
| AWC | Air War College |
| BPZ | Below-Primary-Zone |
| USAF | United States Air Force |

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